New Fiction

Continued from Preceding Page

when he comes to her aid after her humiliation at Monty's house and allows himself to tell her a few blunt truths it logically follows that Patricia capitulates at once. Yet, well as he has understood her from first to last, the thing that even Edgar finds extraordinary is her brief infatuation for Monty. It leads him to utter what may or may not be a profound truth, according as you look at it: "I believe women *must* somehow be less fastidious than men."

The author has used another character, Amy Roberts, as a foil for Patricia, because of her utter contrast in all essential respects. Amy represents that tragic type of modern woman who, with no worthwhile talent, persists in brushing aside the natural instincts for love, marriage and home making and devoting herself to an artistic career, stubbornly blind to the fact that the wretched daubs she produces are praised by friends through contemptuous pity and laughed at behind her back. And just once when a real critic frankly tells Amy the truth she refuses to be convinced, and shouts her slogan of "Naked sex jealousy!"

> "A man's given a chance ta *learn* that he's a fool. We're not. We're up against honeyed lies. It's cotton-wool everywhere, for us, until we're broken by it. They fool us to the top of our bent. They praise our daubs and our abortions of books; and to themselves they're doubled up with laughter. That's what woman's freedom means. It means broken hearts for women."

Despite Mr. Swinnerton's obvious intention of subordinating Amy Roberts she very nearly runs away with the lead. It seems almost a pity that he did not connive with her in this, for she is the more vital character of the two, and her problem more dramatic in its possibilities.

CALVIN WINTER.

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE. By Hamilton Fyfe. Thomas Seltzer.

MR. FYFE'S work should be better known and more widely appreciated in America than it appears to be. He is intellectually far above most of the British novelists of the present, and his appeal is also direct; it should hold elements of popularity in spite of the large content of his writing, not all of which may be apparent to the superficial reader. He has a great deal to say, seriously, but always says it quietly, sometimes banteringly, and he is always entirely lucid. There is no air of specious profundity about him, no posing as the mouthpiece of omniscience, but he sees realities and knows how to display them. In particular, he has in fact the rare capacity, of which many posing writers boast vainly, of understanding the modern woman. He is as far as the poles from the knowingness and defiant astuteness of—for instance—W. L. George, or any of the professional feminists, but no English writer of to-day, save perhaps H. G. Wells, approaches him in his knowledge of the feminine mind and soul.

It is displayed abundantly in this book, with less malice than in his earlier studies—though malice is, after all, hardly accurate, since it is not an unkindly thought often satirical understanding that he shows. In this novel he displays a contrast between two kinds of up to date women: one who refuses maternity, declaring that she "can't stand that sort of thing," and another who is something of the eternal Madonna but is not a bit old fashioned about it. The result is a triangle of a surprisingly new variety, since it ends in the acceptance of the situation as normal, not only by the childless wife, Muriel, but also by the unmarried mother, Margaret. Mr. Fyfe is not given to dogmatic or didactic statement; he lets the situation speak for itself, with fine artistic restraint. But if any conclusion is to be drawn from the story it is that modernism in marriage, as it is coming to be understood by the really forward moving women of England, implies polygamy as a respectable, recognized institution. The arrangement of the book is labeled, humorously but with no lack of serious intent, as a sort of Pericles, Aspasia and Mrs. Pericles affair, but with the parts of the ladies transposed, since it is the Mrs. Pericles of to-day who is billed for the part of intellectual companion. She is, to borrow a vulgar phrase of current slang, literally "friend wife," leaving all other functions of wifehood to the other woman.

It is to be noted that the story manages to make this arrangement not at all a tragic or topsy turvy business. And there is not the faintest trace of the pathological about it. Some years ago an essay appeared in the *Forum* entitled "Feminism and Polygamy," in which it was argued that the logical answer to the real demands of the "new woman" lay only in the reestablishment of some respectable form of polygamy. This story seems to demonstrate that the idea may be actually coming into practice.

HENRY WALKER.

THE UNLIT LAMP. By Elizabeth Sanxay Holding. E. P. Dutton & Co.

READING this book the reviewer became aware of a constantly recurring symbol. It was that of some perfectly constructed piece of mahogany, table or chair, in which all parts, from the selecting of the wood to the putting together of the pieces and their carefully hand wrought finish (no cheap varnish!) have been treated with the utmost skill and honesty. No veneer; nothing slighted; solid value to the core. A thing made today, but with the unmistakable stamp of lastingness. Perhaps, too, a certain heaviness, as of solid old mahogany. Whether this comparison so occurred because much literary furniture not of that type has been forced upon the attention, or whether in spite of the really splendid achievement of the author there clings to it something reminiscent of tools and a strong hand, may be doubtful. Her touch, though she often shows humor of a high quality, is not light. One occasionally becomes restless under an earnestness somewhat overkeen. But one is never bored. Yet the keynote of the book, which is accurately called, in its sub-title, a "study of interactions" is precisely boredom; the long drawn out boredom of a group of people with each other, with their "social position" to which most of them cling with limpetlike vigor—even with the world itself, a tragic, universal boredom. This is poignantly set forth by the very youthful Bertie, an eighteen-year-old philosopher, who, by the way, is one of the most real and lovable characters in current fiction.

And Bertie is only a lesser character. The real actors are not the individuals, clearly as these stand out, but composite groups of people. To these groups is added one uncompromisingly individual person, that "common little man" Stephens, the socialist inventor, whom Claudine, the real leading lady, names the "breath of life" when he blows like a disturbing breeze into the stagnant, correct gloom of her family life, and who, from there onward swings the story all his own way.

The action—or, rather, development—covers twenty years or so, beginning with a dance at a Staten Island home in 1890 and closing when the grandchild of the girl who served as heroine on that first evening is about to appear. The contrast in the first chapters between the happy, untrammeled life of the Staten Island family and the stern, cruel decorum of the fine old Brooklyn family, whence the sulky, pathetic hero of the first part emerges, is as startling as some daring juxtaposition of colors. The author does not like these fine old Brooklyn rectitudes, but she exercises a Hogarthian attention to detail in drawing them. The poor bride's introduction to her mother-in-law's home is a shudderful performance.

Then follows the "interaction" of conflicting temperaments, of misunderstandings, and of the growth of the next generation into a world of nightmarish boredom. In the end poor Claudine comes to a rather sudden realization that some of the fault for the state of things may be her own. "It was the handwriting on the wall—

> The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
> Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin. . . ."

Yet the conclusion leads to an unexpected resolution of the difficulties that made Claudine unhappy; it lies, measurably, in a final recognition of the detachment of each personality from every other.

Continued on Following Page